



Talking to Children about Death

Think about the age of your child. As with everything else, how your child views and reacts to the death of a family member is connected with their physical and emotional maturity. A three year old needs to be treated and spoken to differently than a teenager. Just remember that regardless of age, all members of your family will be affected by the baby's death.

Let your children tell you what they need. Listen to your child carefully, they will tell you what they need. Answer questions honestly, simply and as many times as they are asked. Children grieve differently than adults, so allow them to "play" out their emotions. Don't be surprised if you find your younger child in the corner replaying the death of the baby with friends or dolls, or an older child wanting to go out and play with their friends. These types of behaviors are common and do not mean that your child isn't feeling pain; it only means that the death is being handled in a manner that is comfortable for them.

Create an atmosphere where your child can express fears and emotions. Your child will be feeling many confusing emotions that are no different than your own. Unlike you, they do not have the emotional maturity or life experience to understand them. Expect to hear expressions of anger, fear, and confusion. Never tell your child that they shouldn't be feeling a certain way. They are entitled to their feelings and most will pass with time.

Help them deal with their fears. Younger children don't think in the abstract, to them everything is concrete and real. If you tell them fairy tales about the death, like the baby went to sleep, or the angel of death took the baby, you may find that they become frightened that the same thing may happen to them. One of the biggest fears for preschool children is somehow they too will die and be separated from you, their parent. When explaining death use the correct words, such as, "Joey is dead." "He won't be coming back." Even though your child doesn't quite understand what that means, they will start to understand that death is not reversible.

Reassure your child by sharing your feelings with them. Let them know that you too are sad about your baby's death. Remember to tell them you love them. Make sure they know that nothing they did or said or wished caused the baby to die. Allow, but don't force your child to attend the funeral. Children also need to say good-bye but allow them to choose the most comfortable way to do so. Ask, if they would like to keep something of the baby's to remember their brother/sister.

Ask for help. If you find that you can not talk to your child or are too distressed to deal with your child's emotions, speak to your minister, rabbi, or doctor. You can also call your local public health nurse or your local SIDS parent support group. Just remember that there are many people who are available to help you through this sad and difficult time.



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